

LINE leaf

Newsletter of the London Islamic Network for the Environment

Awareness ~ Reflection ~ Action

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"No true effort is in vain. Look at the fields over there. The grain sown therein has to remain in the earth for a certain time, then it sprouts, and in due time yields hundreds of its kind. The same is the case with every effort in a good cause."

Abdul Ghaffar Khan

Journey to a Distant Land: Fasting for the Planet

■ Muzammal Hussain



At a time in which our efforts too often face the pull of meeting superficial targets, it is unsurprising that so many projects lack real substance. The realm of quality is at risk of becoming a distant land, and those who wish to migrate there might find themselves at odds with the cultural norm. Yet, with awareness, will power, creativity, and an acceptance of superficial discomfort, the journey can begin.

Fast for the Planet is a concept intended to support those with ecological concerns to share this journey with like-minded others. The concept incorporates the practise of fasting, and hence invites us to temporarily 'let go' of a need that is usually essential to our survival. Through this process we can self-purify, develop inner strength and further awaken our soul.

Inner and outer realities of Islam

Muslims are familiar with fasting as a practise especially engaged in during the month of Ramadan; and at the same time there are those who have fasted within other traditions, or indeed in a secular context. *Fast for the Planet* is open to all, and recognises that as we bring more awareness into our fast, we can better develop and draw on the inner strength cultivated through the process. This can then be consciously directed to help transform both individual and collective patterns – patterns that might be disturbing the natural order, into more wholesome ones that are instead nurturing it.

Thus, *Fast for the Planet* has both an inner and an outer dimension. The fasting provides the essential inward motion, whilst the focus on

consciously transforming patterns supports a movement towards a healthier outer reality. For Muslims, this has resonance with the essence of Islam and the way of the Prophet Muhammad (May peace be upon him), who embodied the togetherness of inner purification, with the facilitation of balance and justice in both the social and the wider ecology.

Awakening deeper values

Rather than trying to draw the masses into purchasing an eco-product, the outer aspects of *Fast for the Planet* aim instead to awaken deeper values, which are drawn together to form a more coherent whole. Thus, for example, one intention that forms part of the concept is to move away from 'corporate domination and consumerism', whilst moving towards 'simplicity, sharing and community building'.

These precious qualities and processes were brought to life to an appreciable extent, both in the build-up to, and also at the main event held in London on October 19th 2008. Organised by LINE in partnership with St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, this first *Fast for the Planet* event brought together a diverse range of participants who had each voluntarily fasted for the day. As one of the organisers of the event, my nervousness as to how the event might turn out evaporated as the spirit of sharing and community emerged. The excellent, yet simple food lovingly prepared by participants, that we shared as we broke fast near the end spoke for itself – nourishing home-made soup, home-made bread and cookies, delicious figs from an allotment, as well as curries, salads and rice.

The qualities embodied by the event were supported by three participative workshops: one on *Permaculture*; another on *Debt-free Home Finance*; and the third on *Sharing Stories and Poetry*. The event, though relatively small had been engaging at many levels. It was a satisfying first and there were cries of "Let's make it regular!"

Now, with a *Fast for the Planet* website, elist, blog, and the support of enthusiastic friends, whilst the emerging forms are in process, I sense that the journey looks set to carry on!

For more on *Fast for the Planet*, please see page 3.

Monthly Forums



LINE meets usually on the second Sunday of each month, and visitors are very welcome. Our forums are fun, engaging and like all of our activities there is an emphasis on the process, or means, by which we pursue our objectives. The format of these forums usually looks something like this: In the first half, we hear our speaker talk on a specific topic and we then have an open discussion. Alternatively, we may have a chance to take part in a workshop. In the second half we hear feedback on recent events, and we may also begin dialogue on new projects. At the end of each forum there is usually the option of a trip to a local cafe.

Please also see our website for up-to-date info, including upcoming speakers, workshops & talks.

www.lineonweb.org.uk

Web talks

Our website has up-to-date info on our events, monthly forums and other projects. There is also a background account on Islamic environmentalism in the UK, as well as literature you can download on Islam, ecology, climate change, and more.

We have also recently uploaded two audios: a talk on **Biofuels**; & a short exploration of **Islam & Ecology**. You can listen to these via the following webpage: www.lineonweb.org.uk/Resources/audiovisuals

Community Building: Beyond the Verbal

Inspired by the Transition Town movement, LINE organised a Skills-Sharing workshop as part of a monthly forum. Wasi Daniju writes a personal account of her experience.

Setting the scene for 'puncture repair'



Walking down Archway Road, towards a large group of ladies looking celebratory in bright saris and bare feet, I realised two things: 1) I'd just been directed to a Hindu Temple, and 2) I should never take directions from someone who precedes them with: 'I'm really not sure, but I think...'

Toiling back uphill, I wondered why I was getting quite so many puzzled looks from passers-by – until I remembered that I was, of course, walking along carrying a bike wheel... with a locked chain on it. I wanted to stop and explain, but had to satisfy myself with just trying to look as un-bike-thief-like as possible, and resolving to remove the chain for the journey home.

The sound of silence

Ten minutes, and one friendly couple later, I arrived at my destination – the London Mennonite Centre. A little puffed and warm in the sunshine of what had turned into a beautiful summer afternoon, I was glad to step into the cool, peaceful welcome of the house, and make my way downstairs to join others as the LINE meeting got underway. As we sat in silence for a few moments, I regained a feeling of calm, and by the time our thoughts were focused back into the room, I was ready to proceed.

It was the second Sunday of July, and I was here to take part in the skills-sharing workshop being run as the meeting for LINE that month. There were to be three practical workshops, and a discussion on the meaning of the term 'development', based around a short text by Wolfgang Sachs. As each workshop leader presented the skill they would be sharing, I found myself torn between the chance of re-establishing an old skill (knitting), learning a completely new one (darning), or going for the more thoughtful approach, with the text

discussion. Luckily, the decision was already made – given that I was running the third practical workshop, bicycle puncture repair.

Who is the teacher?

I 'set up' my workshop out in the garden. There was something almost soporific about the surroundings – the balmy weather made the garden, vibrant with flowers and lofty trees, a perfect setting. Going through the process of puncture repair with Hyder, a participant who'd elected to join my workshop, started as a teaching experience, with me in the instructional role. However, it soon morphed, quite smoothly, into something more two-way, as Hyder told me about his experiences of watching bikes being fixed in India, and I learnt alternative ways of going about certain parts of the process.

A knitting & darning corner!



I got the chance to try out my knitting skills, casting on and off under Shumaisa's relaxed tutelage, before giving her a very quick and basic run-through of how to fix a puncture. And suddenly, somehow, two-and-a-half hours had gone by, and the workshops drew to an end.

Hands and minds

There were many comments that spoke to the comfortable feeling of working together, even be it on different tasks, but in the company of others. I certainly felt a real positive and harmonious atmosphere running through the afternoon, as we all got our hands (and minds) engaged, and came away feeling a new level of closeness to other group members. So it would seem that verbal discourse is not the only way – or even necessarily always the best way – to share. And I guess there's something to be said for carrying a solitary bike wheel half-way across London after all.

You can find out more about the Transition Town movement by visiting the following website: www.transitiontowns.org

'Remembrance' in the Kitchen

■ Shumaisa Khan



As a child, my mother would often ask me or my sister to grind cardamom or other spices in a little marble mortar and pestle. I can still access those memories, perhaps because scent is a great stimulator of memories, and manually grinding spices in an open container releases the scents quite pleasantly. Whatever the reason, I recently rediscovered the satisfying sensory experience that comes from grinding away with a mortar and pestle - this time using a larger size, for both dry spices, and pastes of fresh herbs and chillies.

Feeling blessed

A few bangs, and the wonderful aroma of coriander, garlic, ginger and chilli whet the appetite for what's to come. Many traditions invoke *presence* or *mindfulness* as a key to a more fulfilling life. In Islam, even mundane activities can serve as

"Many traditions invoke presence or mindfulness as a key to a more fulfilling life. In Islam, even mundane activities can serve as worship when done with mindfulness and remembrance of the Divine.."

worship when done with mindfulness and remembrance of the Divine.

The pace of life in more 'developed' societies, with instant communication and gadgets that become crutches, often scatters the soul; we end up doing *more* things with *less* presence. Engaging more of our 'self' in actions creates conditions more conducive to presence. Grinding away with the pestle is a different experience to putting the spices and herbs in the food processor, and rushing through the process of preparing food: I can appreciate my muscles, joints, and bones engaged in the task and feel blessed rather than stressed.

Verified by mum

Aside from the difference I feel when using the mortar and pestle, even my mother, who recently visited me, commented on the flavours in the food I had prepared. She had only used the mortar and pestle for dry things. Perhaps the pounding releases flavours from bulbs, leaves, and chillies in a different way than from cutting, grating, or food processing.

While few people have the time to completely rid their kitchens of electronic gadgets, for those who are able to use one, a mortar and pestle can serve as one of a number of ways of engaging more of our being into daily life.

Journeying on with a Debt to Dialogue

By Peter Challen

What is this thrust today?

*It lies in facing up to
the love of power, its offspring,
usurious exploitation, casino mentality;
that we may journey on
in the flow of emergent evolution,
and the grace of God,
wrestling the deep questions
of our existence;
moving on from:
war to peace
ego-systems to eco-systems
competition to collaboration
chains of command to webs of connection
financial markets to fair trading net-
works
hierarchies to holarchies
and so, from
love of power to power of love.*

*Thus,
the power of powerlessness,
transcends,
awakening the global heart
of our common earth identity,
our prior unity,
where 'not-two is Peace'
held in the wholeness
of all opposites,
reaching for Omega.*

Yours along the pilgrim way,

Peter Challen.

Fast for the Planet: More info..



Fast for the Planet is a concept that was initiated by LINE and developed in partnership with St Ethelburga's. Whilst it allows for the practise of fasting to be connected to the wisdom contained within spiritual traditions for those who find benefit through this, it is consciously inclusive. In addition, *Fast for the Planet* connects with the use of fasting by key

figures in human history, such as Abdul Ghaffar Khan as well as Gandhi; figures who have been catalysts for large scale human transformation and social change.

Rather than focussing on a single issue, *Fast for the Planet* weaves together a range of supporting values that include the inner, the economic & community, into a more coherent whole. It comprises a movement *towards*, and a movement *away from*:

Moving away from

Through *Fast for the Planet*, we are expressing an intention to move *away from* our collective submission to:

- corporate domination;
- consumerism;
- the dominant, interest-based and fictitious monetary-system;
- and of course, our dependence on fossil fuels.

Moving towards

Simultaneously we are strengthening an intention that moves us *towards* alternatives that are much more wholesome:

- awakening more of our inner resources and human potential (e.g. through fasting);
- simplicity, sharing and community building;
- economic systems that are nurturing to life, soul & community;
- non-polluting energy, and sustainable use of the earth's resources.

If these values and approach resonate with you, there are a number of ways you can get involved! You might first like to sign up to the *Fast for the Planet* e-list so you're kept updated (this can be done through the website); you could organise a *Fast for the Planet* event through a group, share your thoughts on the blog, or offer a skill!

To find out more

Visit the *Fast for the Planet* website: www.fastfortheplanet.net
Check out the blog: www.fastfortheplanet.blogspot.com

Contacts

Muzammal (LINE): 0845 456 3960 (local rate)
Helen (St Ethelburga's): 020 7496 1610

Some Recent Activities



London International Climate Forum

Over recent months we've contributed to a range of events within London, and also in Liverpool and Sussex.

The top photo shows us at our stall at the London International Climate Forum, where we also spoke at a 'Faith & Climate' workshop, and organised another on 'Banking and Climate Change'.

The bottom photo shows us at a lively event titled 'Green Faiths', held at Worth Abbey Monastery (widely known after 'The Monastery' TV series).

In each of our activities, we always strive to bring wholeness into the process; You can find out more about our activities and our ethos by exploring our website.

Speakers at 'Green Faiths' Event



Dear LINE, I have just read the two editions of *LINE Leaf*, and I am so impressed, I wish that I lived in London and could become involved. You suggested writing letters of support to the Thai villagers who are opposing the Trans Thai-Malaysian gas pipeline. I would be grateful if you could relay this short message on to them for me....

Dear Pipeline Protesters, I have read about your brave struggle against the TTM pipeline and wish to send you words of admiration and support. I read about you on the online magazine produced by LINE. I can imagine that there are enormous difficulties in facing such powerful forces as the governments and commercial proponents of this pipeline, and so you deserve the admiration and gratitude of all of us around the world who are in the midst of our own struggles against similar forces. I wish you courage and strength and justice. This comes to you in the spirit of solidarity. From an admirer in Britain, Jane.

To find out more about the pipeline resistance (also touched on in Issue 2 of *LINE Leaf*), please go to The Cornerhouse's website <www.thecornerhouse.org.uk> and search for 'chana'.

Receive Email Updates

LINE

Do you know that you can stay updated with LINE activities by email? Just look for the link on the upper left hand side of our website (www.lineonweb.org.uk), and you'll be taken to the easy to follow instructions for subscribing to LINEnotices (you'll usually get about two to four emails a month).

Please note: Only those who subscribe to the LINEnotices list are added to it. Also, we have a strict policy of not passing your email address to any third party, unless agreed by you in advance.

Ecobites

There is also an elist called Ecobites which you may like to sign up to. Although not a LINE list, this is UK-wide and would be relevant to anyone interested in Islamic environmentalism in the UK.

The easiest way to subscribe is by sending a blank email to: Ecobites-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Please Support Us - Donors needed!

LINE was initiated in 2004 and quickly established itself as a respected grassroots network. Our work has grown beyond expectation, and we are now in considerable demand. To maintain high standards, we depend on committed volunteers, as well as financial support. In line with our ethos, our day-to-day work is funded entirely by individual donations - *we do not apply for external funds*. This enables us to develop the creative, grassroots approach that we are becoming known for, but it also means that we depend on finances from people like yourself.

We therefore ask you to consider supporting us: either with a **donation**, or a **monthly standing order**. Your support will be received with deep gratitude & will help fund some of the following: venue hire for events (we'd love to keep our monthly forums free, for instance); speaker expenses; stationary & printing (e.g. *LINE Leaf* and Islam & environment literature: we'd like to have more available); web hosting; and stall space at Islamic and justice events.

To donate, you'll need our bank details:

Bank: The Cooperative Bank Sort code: 08-92-99
Account name: LINE Account number: 65173325

You can also find out more here:
www.lineonweb.org.uk/Finance/donate



Web: www.lineonweb.org.uk
Email: leaf [AT] lineonweb.org.uk
Tel: 0845 456 3960 (local rate)

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